Public faith, shame and China's social credit system

Public Faith, Shame and China's Social Credit System

Dr Alexander Chow, School of Divinity, University of Edinburgh

In September 2018, Beijing Zion Church, was shut down by local government officials after refusing to install CCTV on their premises. Zion's senior pastor Ezra Jin has previously been a major advocate for the Chinese missionary movement, Back to Jerusalem, and, with others, has argued for unregistered churches to actively engage in the Chinese civil society. Whilst religious control has been tightening in China since 2014, the recent events must also be connected to the first phase of China's Social Credit System—a means of assessing the trustworthiness of a person based on various criteria, ranging from financial credibility to behaviour on social media and the broader society. This chapter will argue that the rise of digital technologies like social media and CCTV complicate questions of religion and the public-private divide, both in Chinese and Western societies, and further suggests that these technological changes raise new questions to understandings of Christian mission in the digital age.

On the Sunday afternoon of 9 September 2018, local police stormed into Beijing Zion Church (Beijing Xi'an jiaohui)[1] ordering worshippers to leave the premises, confiscating promotional materials, and banning church gatherings as illegal. By the next day, government authorities sealed off the church's rented facilities in Longbaochen Commercial Building (Longbaochen xiezilou). When Zion's senior pastor Ezra Jin (Jin Mingri) enquired about the return of church property, authorities slapped the church with a bill of 1.2 million yuan (approximately £140,000) in back rent and removal costs (Yiu and Law 2018).

The events surrounding the closure of Beijing Zion Church have been covered by international news media outlets (Yiu and Law 2018; Shepherd 2018; World Watch Monitor 2018). Most of these reports have noted that the church began to face troubles after February 2018, when the new Religious Affairs Regulations came into effect (State Council 2017). The new regulations increased pressures on religious groups, especially those like Zion which were not registered with the main state-sanctioned Protestant organization, the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM). They also point out that Beijing authorities in April 2018 asked the church to install 24 closed-circuit television (CCTV) cameras in the building, with facial recognition technology. According to the Chinese state-run news outlet *Global Times*, this was for 'safety reasons' (Yin 2018). However, Jin explained, 'They wanted to put cameras in the sanctuary where

we worship. The church decided this was not appropriate.… Our services are a sacred time' (Shepherd 2018).

Overall, these media outlets have tended to focus on the complexities related to Christian faith and practice in mainland China, often revolving around questions of freedom of religion and church-state relations.[2] Instead, this chapter attempts to situate the events around the closure of Beijing Zion Church within a broader discussion about digital surveillance in mainland China, especially related to the Social Credit System (*shehui xinyong tixi*). Whilst many societies have mechanisms for assessing consumer credit risk, since 2014, the nationwide Social Credit System takes this further by providing a single government system which assesses the economic and social reputation of every business and every person. Companies with bad social credit may have difficulties acquiring new loans and be charged higher taxes. For individuals, those with a low score may have similar financial restrictions; further repercussions include being publicly shamed on billboards or social media platforms, being denied from moving into a particular region or from sending one's children to certain schools, or being banned from travel on high-speed rail or airlines. A key tool for China's Social Credit System is through CCTV cameras (Chin 2018), such as the kind that were to be installed within the premises of Beijing Zion Church.

The Chinese Communist Party has long employed paper-based methods for the 'social management' of its citizens, such as the *dang'an* (personal dossier) and *hukou* (household registration) systems. Whilst social management draws from Leninist roots, there is the added cultural emphasis in China whereby social control is legitimized as a means to achieve harmonious relationships in the society (Hoffman 2017, p. 21; Liang, Das, Kostyuk, and Hussain 2018, pp. 1055–7). In recent years, tensions have increased in Tibet and Xinjiang—two of China's autonomous regions with populations made up of primarily ethno-religious minorities, Tibetan Buddhists and Uighur Muslims, respectively. Access to YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter were all blocked in 2009, following their use to post videos and images of police beatings

in Tibet and of riots in Xinjiang (Harwit 2014). This redirected Chinese social media usage to alternative technologies developed by Chinese Internet firms—such as Youku, Renren, Weibo, and, since 2011, WeChat (Weixin)—all of which are subject to the Chinese government's censors. In 2014, conflicts occurred in various Chinese cities, including suicide bombers and knife-wielding assailants. Chinese authorities quickly denounced these as 'terrorist attacks' and blamed Xinjiang-based militants. This resulted in greater restrictions in Xinjiang, with CCTV cameras and security checkpoints in train stations, hotels, shops, and petrol station, all equipped with facial recognition technologies (Chin and Bürge 2017). Xinjiang became a test site for measures which have becoming increasingly ubiquitous throughout the country.

The Social Credit System moves social management into the digital age by drawing on big data analysis of a multitude of data-gathering sources (Creemers 2016; Liang, Das, Kostyuk, and Hussain 2018). However, as already suggested, this has further ramifications for religious groups. Following the 2017 update to Religious Affairs Regulations, the Ministry of Civil Affairs put out a notice that included requirements for religious organizations and their representatives to provide their social credit identifiers when registering religious activities (2019, art. 4 and 6). In effect, these actions add an extra layer of control over religious groups, given that many are seen as wellsprings of 'foreign infiltration'—whether that be from Islamic extremism, the Dalai Lama (in the case of Tibetan Buddhism), or the West (in the case of Christianity).

Western liberal sensibilities may be quick to attack such surveillance as infringing on individual rights to privacy. However, as we will see, there is rarely a clear-cut boundary between the 'public' and the 'private', especially when we speak of the digital age. Furthermore, Western ideals of a 'public sphere' (coined by Jürgen Habermas in hopes to restore a voice for the bourgeoisie) or a 'public square' (coined by Richard John Neuhaus reflecting American notions of democracy and freedom of religion) (Adams 2013, pp. 281–9) have never been fully realized in China (Chow 2018, pp. 4–7). This is not to say there is no such thing as public speech, but that all public discourse in mainland China is 'directed' through the mediating activities of state-

sponsored propaganda and censorship (Cheek 2015, pp. 272–80). This chapter will show that, whilst urban Christianity in China has been growing in its self-understanding of mission and its use of technology for those purposes, the Chinese government has likewise been utilising technological advancements to manage its directed public space. This chapter will also use China's Social Credit System as a case study for broader theological reflections related to the Christian response to surveillance.

The Growth of Urban Christianity

Ezra Jin, the senior pastor of Zion Church, is a Korean ethnic minority born in Heilongjiang in Northeast China.[3] Jin turned to Christianity in the aftermath of the devastating Tiananmen Square incident of 4 June 1989. At the time as a student in the prestigious Peking University, Jin began visiting a local TSPM-registered church and converted to Christianity several months later. After graduating, he worked for a few years for a foreign company in Beijing, but in 1992 resigned from his job and pursued theological studies at the state-sanctioned Yanjing Seminary and worked for the TSPM-registered Gangwashi Church in Beijing, before going to Fuller Theological Seminary in California in 2002 to pursue a DMin degree. Upon returning to China in 2007, Jin decided to start a new church outside the TSPM system, Beijing Zion Church. This is important because, in China, Protestant and Catholic churches are often divided between those registered with the state through a religious body such as the TSPM (Protestant) or the Catholic Patriotic Association or unregistered 'house churches' (*jiating jiaohui*; mainly Protestant) or 'underground churches' (*dixia jiaohui*; mainly Catholic). The registered groups are often critiqued for allying themselves to the state, whereas the unregistered groups tend to maintain a clandestine existence. For Protestant groups, there is also some debate as to whether there is a kind of 'third church' (*disan jiaohui*) or 'third way' (*disan daolu*) or 'emerging church' (*xinxing jiaohui*) that mediates between registered and unregistered churches which are public and open, yet not compromised with the state (Chow 2018, pp. 108–9). Hence, Ezra Jin explains, 'having

served in the TSPM for more than ten years I knew that it was not pleasing to God. So when I returned, I decided to serve in the house church' (Jin 2014a, p. 2). Yet, despite its unregistered and legally-ambiguous status, the church would grow, develop Korean and Mandarin language services, and, by the time it was banned in 2018, boasted over 1,500 weekly parishioners.

Ezra Jin's story of becoming a Christian is one that is quite common in his generation amongst those shaped by the Tiananmen Square incident. A number of significant leaders and supporters of the 1989 democracy movement—such as Zhang Boli, Xiong Yan, Ren Bumei, and Yuan Zhiming—were forced into exile and subsequently converted to Christianity. The last of these names, Yuan Zhiming, was one of the writers of *River Elegy* (*He Shang*), the much-watched Chinese television series that aired in 1988, portraying the decline of Chinese culture and China's need for democracy and human rights; *River Elegy* has been seen as a catalyst for many who were involved in the 1989 democracy movement. After becoming a Christian in exile in 1992, Yuan again used the power of film to produce videos such as *China's Confession* (*Shen Zhou*) and *The Cross* (*Shizijia*)—now portraying China's need for Christianity. Yuan explains:

> *River Elegy*'s conclusion was that the solution for China was democracy and human rights. But it was only when I got to the West that I realized that the root of this was Christianity. It was the Bible. It creates something more important than rights given by a constitution or a government. It creates God-given rights—endowed by our creator. This made rights something permanent and not dependent on a leader.…
>
> People said, "*River Elegy* was so popular, why don't you try to use broadcast media for God too?" So that was the origins of the series [*The Cross*]. (Johnson 2012)[4]

From the perspective of many onlookers, Deng Xiaoping's tanks crushed the hopes of Tiananmen Square protestors on 4 June 1989. However, for Yuan and a number of other exiled dissidents, they found greater hope in a transcendent source of change in China and the world.

This shift in understanding also occurred for many of this generation who stayed in China and became Christians. Prior to the 1990s, Chinese Christians were regarded as amongst the so-called 'four manys' (*si duo*)—many old, many women, many illiterate, and many ill—that is, 'rice Christians' who were seen as legitimising the Marxist rhetoric that religion is the opiate of the masses. This view was not only promoted by the Chinese Communist Party, but also by certain Christians associated with the TSPM (Bao 1989, p. 3). Many who were involved or supported the 1989 demonstrations were students in middle school or university. Those who found existential resolve in Christianity would become part of a growing cohort of young and well-educated professionals and intellectuals bringing shape to urban Christianity in China in the 1990s and first decades of the twenty-first century (Sun 2007; Yang 2005).[5]

Changing Understandings of Mission

In many ways, Beijing Zion Church is representative of a number of large urban unregistered churches in China. Tracing its history from conception until its closure in 2018 offers us glimpses into the changes in understandings of mission for Chinese Christians, especially when compared to the older generation of unregistered churches.

We can see this in Ezra Jin's attempts to offer a stronger biblical and theological basis for mission as found in the name for his church: Zion. The name is not merely a reference to Jerusalem, but also to an important Chinese understanding of mission known as 'Back to Jerusalem Movement' (Hattaway, Yun, Xu, and Wang 2003; Chan 2013)—the subject of Jin's 2011 DMin dissertation at Fuller Theological Seminary, written in Korean and latter published in English (Jin 2016). The movement is said to have begun in the 1940s when a number of Chinese Christian evangelistic bands organized work in the Western parts of China. As it has continued to develop, especially in the 1980s until the early 2000s, many of those involved have argued that the gospel began in Jerusalem and has travelled through Europe, North America, and Asia, and now is the time for Chinese Christians to bring it back to Jerusalem.

Jin's doctoral dissertation was critical of some of the promoters of the Back to Jerusalem Movement. In particular, he made a distinction between the movement as it has developed within China and individuals and organizations promoting the vision from outside of China (Jin 2016, pp. 20–2). Part of the concern is a difference in focus, as the missionaries within China saw mission work as done by the Chinese church and, as such, were to be financially supported from within, as opposed to needing organizations in Europe and the United States to fund their work. Furthermore, Jin was concerned that the various individuals and organizations promoting the Back to Jerusalem Movement from outside China had questionable biblical understandings and tended to argue for a dispensational view of Zionism. In contrast, his dissertation, supervized by the New Testament scholar Seyoon Kim, attempted to offer a stronger biblical basis for the movement within China. Jin argued that Zion was not the literal geographic location of Jerusalem but a symbolic term pointing to Christ's eschatological reign. In his view, a more appropriate biblical theology of mission must encompass the bringing of all nations back to God. This is why the title of his work takes 'Back to Jerusalem' and appends to it the phrase 'with all nations' (Jin 2016, pp. 157–63).

Ezra Jin's understanding of mission continued to change in 2010 when he, along with some 200 other Chinese church leaders, were invited to join the Lausanne Conference in Cape Town. However, most of these church leaders were stopped by Chinese authorities from passing the Chinese border to attend the conference. Later in 2013, Chinese church leaders were again invited to attend a subsequent meeting held in Seoul at the Asian Church Leaders Forum. It was at this latter meeting that a vision of 'Mission China 2030' was promoted, urging the Chinese church to send 20,000 missionaries out from China by 2030 (Jin 2013; Jin 2016, pp. 161–2). For Jin and other Chinese church leaders, the growth of urban Christianity is accompanied by a growing sense of mission to include evangelism within and beyond China, and the Chinese church's role in the Global Church's understanding of global mission.

A further understanding of mission can be found in an increasingly strong sense of the church's need to be involved in the Chinese civil society. Jin attributes his understanding of this to the writings of Li Fan, a social commentator in Beijing, who argued that the Chinese church is the largest group of NGOs in the Chinese civil society (Jin 2014b). For other urban church leaders, the main turning point was the disastrous May 2008 earthquake in Sichuan province. We can see this demonstrated through the online and print periodical *Almond Flowers* (*Xinghua*) produced by the Beijing Shouwang Church (Shouwang jiaohui), another unregistered urban church. In the beginning of that year, *Almond Flowers* produced articles related to matters often discussed amongst unregistered urban churches, such as the question of church registration and Christian understandings of marriage and family. However, after the 2008 earthquake, the Autumn issue had the theme of 'Social Concern' (*Shehui guanhuai*) which spoke about the need for Christians to offer financial and social aid, underscoring the Chinese church's existence as an NGO serving the Chinese civil society. This was followed by the Winter special issue on the 'Cultural Mandate' (*Wenhua shiming*), drawing from Dutch Neo-Calvinism to legitimate social engagement. One author concluded, 'God's word or biblical truth must enter into a culture and, expressing itself in every domain of this culture, become God's common grace in human society. This is the church's cultural mandate' (Sun 2008, p. 31, *translation mine*).

Hence, whilst the church has been developing within urban centres of China, strengthening in both intellectual and economic bases, it has also been experiencing changing understandings of mission. Firstly, as opposed to the early-twentieth century development of evangelistic bands focusing on bringing the gospel to other Chinese in Asia, the vision of Mission China 2030 is much more encompassing seeing the Chinese church as part of the global mission of the church worldwide. Secondly, as opposed to the historic house church movement from the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) until the 1990s which tended to underscore a separatist understanding of the church with society, drawing on Christian fundamentalism, mission for the unregistered urban churches includes a stronger sense of a public faith which

engages social concerns.[6] Thirdly, these churches have less of a concern maintaining a clandestine existence but, instead, argue for a more open profile. As we will discuss further, this has also included negotiating Christian public presence in the restrictive digital space that is managed by the mainland Chinese government.

Negotiating the Digital Age in China

Much of what has been discussed so far has focused on the shifting nature of Christianity in urban China ever since the 1990s. Whilst the intellectual history has been largely shaped by the events following the 4 June 1989, China has also advanced economically, through its so-called 'socialist market economy', and technologically, especially through the advent of the Internet in the country since 1994. By 2017, China has boasted of having over 700 million Internet users with 95% of them accessing it through mobile phones. As a country with amongst the most Internet users in the world, it is also one of the most restrictive systems in the world due to its so-called 'Great Firewall of China' (Barme and Sang 1997), which blocks access to foreign websites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Wikipedia, as well as acts as a surveillance and censorship tool for content produced within the country. Some netizens in China attempt to circumvent such restrictions or *fanqiang*—literally, to climb over the wall—by using VPN technologies; but these are often blocked and access can be intermittent and vary depending on region. For urban Christians wishing to produce an open and digital profile, this becomes a much more complicated space to negotiate.

In the case of Zion Church, the choice of digital platforms is fairly focused on its mission, as described on its website, to build the 'Kingdom of God in the family, in the society, and in the whole earth, until the nations return to the discipleship community of Zion' (Zion Church 2018, *translation mine*). In many ways, its approach is similar to large evangelical churches in the West in their use of technology, in promoting its sermons and various programmes. However, its website was hosted in the United States so, whilst it can be blocked by the Great

Firewall of China, the church's content could not be easily deleted by Chinese censors. This also meant the ability to update or read the website requires those with working VPN access. It perhaps indicates why the site was not updated after it was banned and is subsequently no longer available. Zion also ran a series of social media accounts. It used a WeChat social media account for about five years, which was closed abruptly by officials in June 2018; a series of alternative WeChat accounts would also be closed in June and August 2018. Furthermore, as the church produced video recordings of its church services, it published them on the Chinese video hosting site Youku, which was also shut down (SCI China Correspondent 2018). The irony of this last point about videos is that, whilst Jin was happy for services to be video recorded for the church's social media accounts, he was not willing for CCTV cameras to be put in the sanctuary because, as he explained, 'Our services are a sacred time.'

Whilst some churches follow Zion's pattern of using technology to facilitate a mission to build the Kingdom of God, others have used the Internet as a discursive space for theological and social commentary. In many ways, this is an extension of China's history of print culture dating to development of woodblock printing in the Tang dynasty (618–907), when Chinese intellectuals instrumentalized the technology to spread their ideas in the Chinese public space.[7] When Protestant missionaries introduced moveable-type to China in the late-eighteenth century (Reed 2011), Chinese Christian intellectuals would likewise follow suit and introduce Christian periodicals in the early-twentieth century, such as the Protestant *Truth and Life* (*Zhenli yu Shengming*) (Ling 1980, pp. 62–5, 71; Barwick 2011, pp. 69–70) and the *Catholic Review* (*Shengjiao zazhi*) (Starr 2016, pp. 100–27; Lai and Li 2017, pp. 166–86), and in the late-twentieth century, such as the *Christian Culture Review* (*Jidujiao wenhua pinglun*) (Fällman 2008, pp. 23–5).

With the advent of the Internet, Chinese Christians would begin to bridge from print culture into digital culture. The online digital format allows content to be more easily copy-and-pasted and distributed through multiple digital platforms. One of these periodicals, *The Banquet* (*Aiyan*), was produced by the Beijing pastor Cai Zhuohua from 2002 until 2008 and operated a

hybrid model of both print and digital editions; but due to the complexities of producing and distributing paper copies through the postal system, it was constantly encouraging its readers to move to the online format (Wielander 2013, pp. 89–91). Another periodical which offered print and digital editions, which was mentioned earlier in this chapter, is Shouwang's *Almond Flowers*, which was produced from 2007 until it ended with three final issues in 2013—two years after the church was evicted from its property and its pastors and elders arrested. Despite these setbacks, since 2011, Shouwang continues to produce an online-only periodical *@Shouwang* (previously known as *Shouwang Online Journal* [*Shouwang wangluo qikan*]). As periodicals, *The Banquet*, *Almond Flowers*, and *@Shouwang* collected writings from a variety of figures and promoted a range of topics, from Christian theology and practice within contemporary China, to legal commentary produced by Christian lawyers and legal scholars. They were also hosted on servers based outside of mainland China. Like Zion, whilst they could be blocked by the Great Firewall of China, their content could not be easily deleted by Chinese censors. However, it also suggests that there is a limited ability for other Chinese netizens to access the content, given that they would need the technological means to 'climb over the wall'.

A different approach to technology may be seen in a figure such as Wang Yi. Formerly a law professor at Chengdu University and human rights lawyer, Wang was recognized as one of China's fifty most influential public intellectuals in the politically liberal leaning periodical, *Southern People's Weekly* (2004). After defending a number of house churches, Wang converted to Christianity and became the senior pastor of the Early Rain Reformed Church (Qiuyu zhi fu guizheng jiaohui), which was later renamed the Early Rain Covenant Church (Qiuyu shengyue jiaohui).

As a pastor, Wang Yi was active using a variety of blogging and microblogging technologies to promote his theological and political commentary. Whilst he utilized blogging platforms hosted both inside and outside of China, he also became increasingly vocal on the Chinese social media platforms Weibo and WeChat (Vala and Huang 2017, pp. 176–81). In

contrast to the regular issues of periodicals such as *The Banquet* and *Almond Flowers*, the public intellectual Wang Yi utilized technologies which enabled him to communicate his ideas much more idiosyncratically, responding to recent events more quickly. As he was regularly using Chinese blogging and microblogging platforms, this garnered a much larger readership; but it could also more easily be taken down, as was the case after he was arrested and his church closed by government authorities in December 2018. In a surprising turn of events, 48 hours after his arrest, members of the church circulated a public letter that Wang Yi penned in anticipation of his arrest entitled 'My Declaration of Faithful Disobedience', which was widely publicized in Chinese and English, both within and outside of China (Wang 2018). Members of the church continue to post updates on Wang Yi and the church through platforms hosted outside China, such as Facebook (https://www.facebook.com/earlyraincovenantchurch) and Github (https://github.com/chengduqiuyu/-/issues).

In each of these examples, we see different uses of technology to support different understandings of mission. For a church like Zion, the digital presence facilitates a mission of building the Kingdom of God. For others, their digital engagement is an extension of their civic engagement, sustaining the church's relationship with the state and the society. These realities became much more complicated when the latest Religious Affairs Regulations came into effect in February 2018, which now mandates Internet religious activities to have prior permission from relevant government bodies (State Council 2017, art. 47, 48, and 68). Of course, as all of these churches were unregistered, none of them could appropriately request permission for their online religious activities.

The changes in the Religious Affairs Regulations reflect a larger national narrative as found within the latest Cybersecurity Law (National People's Congress 2016, art. 1) underscores a policy of so-called 'Cyberspace Sovereignty' (*wangluo kongjian zhuquan*). This upholds a view that for the state to be truly sovereign, it needs to not only protect itself from outside forces, it also needs to manage the development of inside forces. It is the latter point that brings us back to

China's Social Credit System, which is a means of putting checks and balances on those who are within China's borders.[8] It is the management of individuals not merely through imprisonment of those 'guilty' of breaking specific laws, but also through highlighting the 'shame' of those with bad behaviour[9]—through billboards and social media—and preventing them from access to exclusive benefits for socially trustworthy citizens.

Conclusion

China's entrance into the digital age has offered new vistas for innovation—whether this be for urban Christians developing their understanding of mission or the Chinese state's evolution of social management. Yet, this is not simply a matter for Christians *out there* in a one-party state such as socialist China. Internet surveillance, CCTV, and other technologies are ubiquitous in Western liberal democracies as well. Whilst some may be afraid of Big Brother watching in an Orwellian state, many will also unwittingly give up their privacy to multinational corporations such as Google or Facebook for the convenience of targeted search results, newsfeeds, and advertisements—in the name of consumerism or, as Shoshana Zuboff (2019) puts it, 'surveillance capitalism'. How do or should Christians in China and elsewhere respond to such tensions?

In this chapter, we may interpret the various Chinese Christian aspirations of mission as a growing understanding and participation in the *missio Dei*. What then is the relationship between mission and social credit? We all have social credit, whether we are within the borders of China or not, and whilst Christ is the central figure of Christianity, it is the church that represents this central figure on earth for others to encounter. Christian lives are imperfect mirrors of God's mission in this world. The social credit of Christians imperfectly reflects the social credit of God.

Related to this is the question of what constitutes public theology. It is a concept which has arisen to underscore the publicness of Christianity in the face of secularism's attempts to

privatize all forms of religiosity. It is said that religious faith and practice is about personal choice at home and has no bearing on matters of public concern, and that the pulpit is no place to discuss politics. Charles Taylor makes a distinction between the 'modern, bounded self' and the 'porous self' of an earlier enchanted world. The former emphasizes the autonomy of individuals who see themselves 'as invulnerable, as master of the meaning of things', whereas the porous self is vulnerable 'to spirits, demons, cosmic forces' (Taylor 2007, p. 38). The bounded self is characteristic of many Western societies, whereby individual morality is related but separate from matters of public concern. Contrastingly, across two millennia of Chinese history, Confucianism has upheld an integrated relationship between the private and the public, whereby the individual has a porous relationship with the other. Hence, the Chinese ideal of 'inward sageliness, outward kingliness' (*neisheng waiwang*) asserts that individual moral transformation is a prerequisite for enacting change in the society and the world around them. This is perhaps also suggested in Luke 6:45 when Jesus states, 'for it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks'. In other words, the public is an outworking of the private. Digital technologies increasingly blur the line between public and private (Lyon 2001, pp. 20–3), and in many ways are returning our societies to have more porous selves in enchanted and digitized worlds.

Whilst we often consider technologies such as the Internet as limitless, offering a digital space which transcends the physical space, the Chinese legal system seeks to build a fence or, better, a wall (or a Great Firewall) along its physical borders. A wall, of course, is meant to keep dangers out and to protect treasures that are within. This is why Eric Stoddart (2016) argues that surveillance technologies should not only be understood in terms of control, but also from the perspective of care—as a faithful parent or teacher or friend may watch over the wellbeing of others. It would be naïve to see the Chinese government as simply a power-hungry authoritarian state; it also exists to care for its citizens and to bring about unity and stability for a diverse and sometimes contentious society.

Theologically, Stoddart reminds us that 'a Christian response to surveillance must involve a deeply practical appreciation of the contingency of this, God's, world' (2016, p. 6). Governments and multinational corporations may use surveillance for a mixture of benevolent and malevolent purposes, but their abilities to control this world is finite. Furthermore, it is God who has bestowed upon them the authority that they have (Romans 13). Christians are called to acknowledge the One Who truly transcends the physical—and the digital—space. Cyberspace Sovereignty is but a pale imitation of Divine Sovereignty, the ultimate source of authority in China and throughout the cosmos.

Bibliography

Adams, Nicholas, 'Interreligious Engagement in the Public Sphere', in *Understanding Interreligious Relations*, edited by David Cheetham, Douglas Pratt, and David Thomas, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, pp. 281–305.

Bao Zhimin, 'Facing Reality and Responding to Challenges: On Ten Years of Chinese Church Reconstruction', trans. Francesca Rhys, *Chinese Theological Review* 5 (1989): 1–6.

Barme, Geremie R. and Sang Ye, 'The Great Firewall of China', *Wired* (1 June 1997), available at https://www.wired.com/1997/06/china-3, archived at https://perma.cc/VF4G-6NJP.

Barwick, John, 'Liu Tingfang: Christian Minister and Activist Intellectual', in *Salt and Light 3: More Lives of Faith That Shaped Modern China*, edited by Carol Lee Hamrin with Stacey Bieler, Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publishers, 2011, pp. 59–80.

Benedict, Ruth, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1946.

Cao Nanlai, *Constructing China's Jerusalem: Christians, Power, and Place in Contemporary Wenzhou*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011.

Chan, Kim-kwong, 'The Back to Jerusalem Movement: Mission Movement of the Christian Community in Mainland China', *Mission Spirituality and Authentic Discipleship*, edited by Wonsuk Ma and Kenneth R. Ross, Oxford: Regnum, 2013, pp. 172–92.

Cheek, Timothy, *The Intellectual in Modern Chinese History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

Chin, Josh and Clément Bürge, 'Twelve Days in Xinjiang: How China's Surveillance State Overwhelms Daily Life', *Wall Street Journal*, 20 December 2017, available at https://www.wsj.com/articles/twelve-days-in-xinjiang-how-chinas-surveillance-state-overwhelms-daily-life-1513700355.

Chin, Josh, 'Chinese Police Add Facial-Recognition Glasses to Surveillance Arsenal', *Wall Street Journal*, 7 February 2018, available at https://www.wsj.com/articles/chinese-police-go-robocop-with-facial-recognition-glasses-1518004353.

Chow, Alexander, *Chinese Public Theology: Generational Shifts and Confucian Imagination in Chinese Christianity*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.

Chow, Alexander, 'Public Theology Behind the Great Firewall of China', in *Christianity and the Digital Humanities*, edited by Tim Hutchings and Claire Clivaz, Berlin: De Gruyter, *forthcoming*.

Creemers, Rogier, 'Cyber China: Upgrading Propaganda, Public Opinion Work and Social Management for the Twenty-First Century', *Journal of Contemporary China* 26, no. 103 (2017): 85–100.

Crouch, Andy, 'The Return of Shame', *Christianity Today* 59, no. 2 (2 March 2015): 32–40.

Fällman, Fredrik, *Salvation and Modernity: Intellectuals and Faith in Contemporary China*, rev. edn, Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2008.

Georges, Jayson and Mark D. Baker, *Ministering in Honor-Shame Cultures: Biblical Foundations and Practical Essentials*, Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016.

Harwit, Eric, 'The Rise and Influence of *Weibo* (Microblogs) in China', *Asian Surey* 54, no. 6 (November/December 2014): 1059–87.

Hattaway, Paul, Brother Yun, Peter Xu Yongze, and Enoch Wang, *Back to Jerusalem: Called to Complete the Great Commission*, Carlisle: Piquant, 2003.

Hoffman, Samantha, 'Managing the State: Social Credit, Surveillance and the CCP's Plan for China', *China Brief* 17, no. 11 (17 August 2017): 21–7, available at https://jamestown.org/program/managing-the-state-social-credit-surveillance-and-the-ccps-plan-for-china/.

Jin, Ezra, 'A Landmark Encounter: The Significance of the ACLF for the church in China', *Lausanne Global Analysis* 2, no. 3 (November 2013), available at https://www.lausanne.org/content/lga/2013-11/a-landmark-encounter-the-significance-of-the-aclf-for-the-church-in-china, archived at https://perma.cc/BZ8F-HBZZ.

Jin, Ezra, ed., *Emerging Urban Churches in China*, CCRC 2014a.

Jin, Ezra, 'For Our Faith and for Our Society', unpublished lecture, 'Religious Freedom and Chinese Society: A Symposium of Case Analysis', Center on Religion and Chinese Society, Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN, 5-7 May 2014b.

Jin, Ezra, *Back to Jerusalem with All Nations: A Biblical Foundation*, Oxford: Regnum, 2016.

Johnson, Ian, 'Jesus vs. Mao? An Interview With Yuan Zhiming', *New York Review of Books*, 4 September 2012, available at https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2012/09/04/jesus-vs-mao-interview-yuan-zhiming, archived at https://perma.cc/HEP8-BD37.

Kirkpatrick, David C., *A Gospel for the Poor: Global Social Christianity and the Latin American Evangelical Left*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019.

Lai, Pan-chiu and Li Lili, 'Chinese Catholic Responses to Sino-Japanese War: A Study of Xu Zongze's Public Theology of War and Peace', in *Yearbook of Chinese Theology, 2017*, edited by Paulos Z. Huang, Leiden: Brill, 2017, pp. 166–86.

Liang Fan, Vishnupriya Das, Nadiya Kostyuk, and Muzammil M. Hussain, 'Constructing a Data-Driven Society: China's Social Credit System as a State Surveillance Infrastructure', *Policy and Internet* 10, no. 4 (August 2018): 415–53.

Ling, Samuel D., 'The Other May Fourth Movement: The Chinese "Christian Renaissance", 1919–1937', PhD dissertation, Temple University, 1980.

Lyon, David, *Surveillance Society: Monitoring Everyday Life*, Buckingham: Open University Press, 2001.

Ministry of Civil Affairs, 'Guanyu zongjiao huodong changsuo banli faren dengji shixiang de tongzhi' [Notice concerning procedures for the registration of sites for religious activities], *Religious Affairs Bureau, Ministry of Civil Affairs*, 5 January 2019, available at http://www.gov.cn/gongbao/content/2019/content_5395498.htm.

Morgan, Timothy C., 'Prominent Chinese Christian Convert Accuses Another of Rape', *Christianity Today*, 27 February 2015, available at https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2015/february/convert-chai-ling-accuses-yuan-zhiming-rape-china-soul-aga.html.

National People's Congress, 'Cybersecurity Law 2016', *Standing Committee of the National People's Congress*, 7 November 2016, available at http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2016-11/07/content_5129723.htm, English translation at https://www.chinalawtranslate.com/en/2016-cybersecurity-law/.

Reed, Christopher A., *Gutenberg in Shanghai: Chinese Print Capitalism, 1876–1937*, Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011.

Samuel, Vinay and Albrecht Hauser, eds., *Proclaiming Christ in Christ's Way: Studies in Integral Evangelism*, Oxford: Regnum, 1989.

SCI China Correspondent, 'Who Wants to Evict Zion Church Beijing?' *St. Charles Institute*, 1 September 2018, available at http://www.stcharlesinstitute.org/voices/2018/9/1/who-wants-to-evict-zion-church-beijing, archived at https://perma.cc/3GYT-RPYJ.

Shepherd, Christian, 'For a "house church" in Beijing, CCTV cameras and eviction', *Reuters*, 30 August 2018, available at https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-religion/for-a-house-church-in-beijing-cctv-cameras-and-eviction-idUSKCN1LF0EF, archived at https://perma.cc/R9J2-5LU3.

Southern People's Weekly, 'Yingxiang Zhongguo gonggong zhishifenzi 50 ren' [The Influence of China's 50 Public Intellectuals], *Nanfang renwu zhoukan* [*Southern People's Weekly*], 9 September 2004, available at http://business.sohu.com/s2004/zhishifenzi50.shtml, archived at https://perma.cc/TN3N-KXGZ.

Stanley, Brian, *The Global Diffusion of Evangelicalism: The Age of Billy Graham and John Stott*, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013.

Starr, Chloë F., *Chinese Theology: Text and Context*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016.

State Council, 'Religious Affairs Regulations 2017', *State Council of the People's Republic of China*, 26 August 2017, available at http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2017-09/07/content_5223282.htm, English translation at https://www.chinalawtranslate.com/en/religious-affairs-regulations-2017/.

Stoddart, Eric, *Theological Perspectives on a Surveillance Society: Watching and Being Watched*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2016.

Sun Mingyi, 'Renshi Zhongguo chengshi jiating jiaohui' [Understanding the Urban House Church in China], *Jumu* [*Behold*] 26 (May 2007): 12–17.

Sun Mingyi, 'Zhongguo jiaohui chengsheng guan ji wenhua shiming lianxiang' [The Relationship Between Sanctification and the Cultural Mandate in the Chinese Church], *Xinghua* [*Almond Flowers*] (Winter 2008): 25–31.

Taylor, Charles, *A Secular Age*, Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2007.

Vala, Carsten and Huang Jianbo, 'Three High-Profile Protestant Microbloggers in Contemporary China: Expanding Public Discourse or Burrowing into Religious Niches on Weibo?', in

Religion and Media in China: Insights and Case Studies from the Mainland, Taiwan and Hong Kong, edited by Stefania Travagnin, New York: Routledge, 2017, pp. 167–86.

Wang Yi, 'My Declaration of Faithful Disobedience', trans. China Partnership, 4 October 2018, available at http://www.chinapartnership.org/blog/2018/12/my-declaration-of-faithful-disobedience, archived at https://perma.cc/AFN8-J5AA.

Wielander, Gerda, *Christian Values in Communist China*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2013.

World Watch Monitor, 'China Bans Zion, Beijing's Biggest House Church', *Christianity Today*, 10 September 2018, available at https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2018/september/china-bans-zion-beijing-house-church-surveillance-ezra-jin.html.

Wu, Jackson, *Saving God's Face: A Chinese Contextualization of Salvation through Honor and Shame*, Pasadena, CA: William Carey International University Press, 2012.

Yang Fenggang, 'Lost in the Market, Saved at McDonald's: Conversion to Christianity in Urban China', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 44, no. 4 (2005): 435–7.

Yin Han, 'Beijing closes Christian house church for conducting illegal activities', *Global Times*, 11 September 2018, available at http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1119249.shtml, archived at https://perma.cc/PE6J-6MJP.

Yiu Pak and Elizabeth Law, 'Beijing charges shuttered church $170,000 after eviction', *AFP*, 26 September 2018, available at https://news.yahoo.com/beijing-charges-shuttered-church-170-000-eviction-105823937.html, archived at https://perma.cc/JH6P-42VH.

Yu Jie and Wang Yi, *Yi sheng yi shi de yangwang* [The expectation for whole life], Taipei: Christian Arts Press, 2010.

Zion Church, 'Zion Church', formerly available at http://www.zionbeijing.com/, archived on 7 November 2018 at https://web.archive.org/web/20181107214305/http://www.zionbeijing.com/.

Zuboff, Shoshana, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*, London: Profile Books, 2019.

---

[1] Chinese terms in this chapter will be offered using pinyin romanization of the Mandarin language, as is the convention for scholarly work related to mainland China.

[2] Much of this is shaped by the priorities of Western liberal democracies. For instance, whilst much of the Anglophone literature discusses 'freedom of religion' (*zongjiao ziyou*), the Chinese constitution only guarantees 'freedom of religious belief' (*zongjiao xinyang ziyou*). This is an important distinction as it suggests that, whilst religious belief (and non-belief) may have legal standing, various religious practices can be deemed illegal.

[3] Biographical information of Ezra Jin comes from a number of sources, though much of this information is based on a pamphlet he edited (Jin 2014a) and an interview conducted by Yu Jie (Yu and Wang 2010, pp. 49–77).

[4] In 2015, Yuan Zhiming was accused of raping fellow democracy activist Chai Ling in 1990, before either of them became Christians. Yuan subsequently resigned from the organization which produced the Christian videos, China Soul for Christ Foundation. See Morgan 2015.

[5] There are of course other factors than the Tiananmen Square incident that has brought shape to urban Christianity. Another major factor has been the growth of the socialist market economy since the 1990s, which has led to the rise of 'boss Christians' (*laoban Jidutu*) amongst entrepreneurs within coastal regions such as Wenzhou (see Cao 2011). However, the focus of the discussion in this chapter is mainly amongst those sometimes described as 'intellectual elite Christians' (*zhishi jingying Jidutu*) (see Chow 2018, pp. 92–114).

[6] In many respects, this echoes the developments that have come out of the Lausanne 1974 conference wherein church leaders of Africa, Asia, and Latin America argued that evangelical mission needed to affirm both evangelism and social responsibility, in what was variably termed 'integral mission' or 'holistic mission'. See Stanley 2013, pp. 151–79; Samuel and Hauser 1989; Kirkpatrick 2019.

[7] In these respects, there are many parallels between Christianity in Europe and Confucianism in China, given that both were used to offer a philosophical basis for the state at the time and chose to promote their ideas through print culture. For a discussion on the relationship between Chinese Christianity and Chinese digital culture more fully in another article, see Chow *forthcoming*. See also Cheek 2015, pp. 35–9.

[8] A further question may be raised about whether such aspirations of China's sovereignty is limited by the physical borders of mainland China, or may extend beyond. This is perhaps one of the concerns in 2014 and 2019 of Beijing's reach into Hong Kong.

[9] The idea that different contexts can be understood as either a 'guilt culture' or a 'shame culture' was first raised by the anthropologist Ruth Benedict (1946). Whilst it may be useful to state that certain cultures are more disposed to focusing on 'guilt' or 'shame', we should also be careful not to distil all cultures down to one position or the another. Andy Crouch (2015) shows how the technological age has highlighted the challenges of honour and shame within Western societies, in his article on the practice of 'doxing' another person's private information for online bullying on social media.

Recent missiological literature engages 'shame' in terms of how one experiences sin and the need to reconceptualise soteriological categories with the notion of 'honour', for evangelistic and pastoral purposes. See Wu 2012; Georges and Baker 2016.

Care needs to be taken when diagnosing the experiences of 'guilt' or 'shame'. It may be true that these experiences can come from personal or original sin. It may also be true that a person or an institution may be manipulating, harassing, or abusing another.